United Nations E/ICEF/2009/6

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 November 2008

Original: English

For information

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
First regular session 2009
4-6 February 2009
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit of relevance to UNICEF

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides information on reports prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) during the period October 2007 through September 2008 that are of specific relevance to UNICEF and have not yet been considered by the Executive Board. The document presents UNICEF action taken and views held on the issues raised by the inspectors.

I. Overview

1. Reports of the JIU are submitted to the executive heads of the organizations concerned, who then act upon them, as appropriate, and report to their relevant Executive Boards. The present document provides (a) information on JIU reports prepared from October 2007 through September 2008 that are considered relevant to the administration and management of UNICEF; (b) comments regarding the conclusions and recommendations contained in the reports; and (c) a summary of actions undertaken.

2. Since the previous UNICEF secretariat note (E/ICEF/2008/6) was presented to the Executive Board at the first regular session of 2008, UNICEF has continued its dialogue with the JIU on issues presented in the reports and on follow-up. This dialogue and interaction on issues of common interest have increased the relevance of the reports, improved implementation of recommendations and enhanced

* E/ICEF/2009/1.

08-61578 (E) 151208

transparency. There is strengthened coordination among member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to ensure consistency and coherence in the handling of JIU reports for maximum benefit.

II. Reports submitted by the JIU of direct relevance to UNICEF

3. Since October 2007, the JIU has issued two reports of direct relevance to UNICEF. The comments, observations and follow-up notes of UNICEF are summarized below.

A. "Knowledge Management in the United Nations System" (JIU/REP/2007/6)

4. From a system-wide perspective, this JIU report examines mainly (a) whether there is a common understanding of the term knowledge management (KM) and what this area covers; (b) the perception of the need to apply KM in the various organizations of the United Nations system; (c) the understanding of KM strategies, structures and initiatives; (d) the formal and informal circuits used for the implementation of such initiatives; and (e) the supportive factors and barriers in the development of KM activities.

5. Among its findings, the report highlights the necessity to enhance the coordination of system-wide KM activities through developing KM and knowledge-sharing (KS) strategies. For this purpose, the report recommends that the CEB formulate common definitions, terminology and general standards and guidelines on KM and that the executive heads carry out comprehensive information reviews. In addition, the report's five specific recommendations seek to strengthen each organization's KM activities by, *inter alia*, establishing dedicated KM units within each organization, surveying knowledge needs and gaps as a prelude to developing/revising KM strategies, developing a common search engine through the existing systems and databases, and establishing KS competencies in the staff performance appraisal system.

6. UNICEF participated in the Secretary-General's response to, and consolidated comments of CEB member organizations on, the final report of this review. UNICEF welcomes the report, as its release actually coincides with UNICEF activities in the area of KM/KS. Given that it is difficult to cover in depth a topic as broad as KM, UNICEF notes that the recommendations do not always convey the complexity of developing a comprehensive KM strategy. In addition, some of the recommendations also lack a clear cost-benefit analysis to determine their value. Nevertheless, UNICEF appreciates the overall thrust of the report and its significant added value to this important area of KM/KS for UNICEF as well as for the entire United Nations system.

7. Two of the report's recommendations are directed at executive heads, another two at the CEB and one at legislative organs. The following three recommendations (recommendations 2, 3 and 5) are of most relevance to the KM work of UNICEF.

8. Recommendation 2 states that the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations should (a) survey the knowledge needs of the clients (internal

and external) of their organizations; (b) undertake an in-house knowledge inventory for each organization; (c) identify and address the potential knowledge gaps existing between the needs of clients and the knowledge available within each organization; and (d) ensure that each organization develops, or revises, its own KM strategy based on the above points and on guidelines to be developed by the CEB.

9. While UNICEF, along with other CEB members, broadly supports this recommendation, many members have indicated that the recommendation lacks some key components. For example, members suggest that the activities covered in this recommendation be integrated with strategic planning or other planning processes, and that identified knowledge gaps and knowledge sources be prioritized.

10. CEB members also point out the following: (a) the analysis that underpins this recommendation appears to present 'knowledge' and 'information' as almost equivalent terms and therefore runs the risk of conveying an incomplete picture of how to develop a KM strategy; (b) the recommendation does not mention the processes for knowledge acquisition, mobilization and exchange, which may in themselves cause overlaps and gaps; (c) complying with this recommendation could take years and entail substantial costs, given that knowledge needs reorganizing and updating, and the KM unit needs to become permanent; and (d) the challenges of behaviour change aiming to facilitate and encourage KS should not be underestimated.

11. UNICEF strongly believes that a well-thought-out Knowledge Strategy is an essential prerequisite for a well-functioning Knowledge Management programme. To this end, and as envisaged by the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan 2006-2009 (2011), UNICEF has already begun the process of developing its own Knowledge Strategy. One element of this will include a review of existing KM strategies of other agencies.

12. Recommendation 3 proposes that the General Assembly and the respective governing bodies of the United Nations system organizations make the necessary provisions for establishing dedicated KM units within each organization. The KM units should be provided with the necessary financial and human resources, according to the specific needs of each organization.

13. UNICEF, together with CEB members, have expressed limited and qualified support for this recommendation while recognizing that a separate KM entity may facilitate the mainstreaming of KS activities into the regular work of staff members. However, members argue that the report does not present any cost-benefit basis for this recommendation, despite the clear financial implications. Many members express concern about the lack of clear guidance regarding the focus of KM units, while some believe that establishing KM units should not be a precondition for developing and implementing a quality KM programme, especially given the tight resource constraints faced by members.

14. While dedicated KM entities may not be appropriate in all organizations, UNICEF established a Knowledge and Content Management Initiative (KCMI) in 2008, the purpose of which is to significantly improve knowledge management and knowledge-sharing. Technical sections within UNICEF are also enhancing their own KM capacity.

15. Recommendation 5 suggests that the executive heads of the United Nations system organizations establish KS competencies as one of the criteria to be assessed in the staff performance appraisal system.

16. UNICEF welcomes this recommendation as a critical component for the success of any KM strategies. CEB members also highlight the need for integrating KM/KS into the results-based management frameworks of organizations. While many Members indicate that they have already begun to implement components of this recommendation, others call for a broader-based approach that will more fully address the obstacles identified by this JIU report as well as by the Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the thematic evaluation of knowledge management networks in the pursuit of the goals of the Millennium Declaration (E/AC.51/2006/2). Members also point to the cultural limitations that inhibit KS within organizations, and the lack of leadership support and incentives and rewards that encourage capacity-building and KS.

17. UNICEF fully supports and concurs with the above-mentioned consolidated CEB responses. UNICEF has recently begun work on the development of KM-specific competencies, which will also take into account existing work done by other agencies in this area.

B. "Review of the progress made by the United Nations system organizations in achieving Millennium Development Goal 6, target 7, to combat HIV/AIDS" (JIU/REP/2007/12)

18. This review focuses on the role of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Secretariat and its cosponsors in achieving Millennium Development Goal 6, target 7, to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. It aims to provide Member States with an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of policies, programmes, and coordination and cooperation efforts among United Nations system organizations, as well as the bottlenecks in achieving this target.

19. Based on findings of the review, the report suggests that both the UNAIDS mandate and the authority of the Programme Coordinating Board need to be strengthened, and the number of co-sponsors reduced to the six original organizations, so that UNAIDS can effectively play its lead role in coordinating and monitoring the fight against HIV/AIDS. The report further recommends several actions: (a) improve coordination at the country level; (b) enhance the effectiveness of the "three ones" principles; (c) effectively implement access to antiretroviral therapy; (d) increase civil society participation; and (e) ensure worldwide dissemination of information on activities related to HIV/AIDS.

20. UNICEF joined the UNAIDS Secretariat and the other cosponsors in the process of providing consolidated UNAIDS comments during the review. While the review addresses many pertinent issues, UNICEF, together with the UNAIDS family, is concerned that the draft report does not present an accurate assessment of the global progress in responding to AIDS or the considerable achievements of the UNAIDS family since the establishment of the Joint Programme.

21. Generally, UNICEF and the other organizations in the UNAIDS family note that the review is about the role of Member States in achieving the Millennium

Development Goals and, therefore, there are a number of recommendations, such as recommendation 4, that are beyond the control of United Nations system organizations. Similarly, some recommendations, notably recommendation 2, conflict with the governance structure and mandates of the various co-sponsors, and hence would be difficult to implement. Finally, the report would gain clarity through the correct utilization of the terms 'UNAIDS' (10 co-sponsors plus the Secretariat) and 'UNAIDS Secretariat'. This will help to understand the nature and subject of the discussion and subsequent recommendations.

22. UNICEF fully supports and concurs with the above-mentioned consolidated UNAIDS responses and has no additional comments to add. However, most of the consolidated UNAIDS comments were not incorporated in the final report of this JIU review.

III. Ongoing/forthcoming reports of the Joint Inspection Unit of relevance to UNICEF

23. At present, UNICEF has been participating in the initial collection of information, discussions and reviews for several JIU reviews and draft reports under way. At the Executive Board's first regular session of 2010, UNICEF looks forward to presenting its comments, as appropriate, on some or all of the JIU reviews and reports scheduled for completion in 2008 and beyond that have potential relevance to the work of UNICEF. Below is the preliminary list of such reports:

(a) Review of the United Nations humanitarian air service;

(b) Corporate consultancies in United Nations system organizations;

(c) Junior Professional Officer/associate expert/associate professional officer programmes in United Nations system organizations;

(d) Common services in Nairobi;

(e) Information technology hosting services in United Nations system organizations;

(f) Management of Internet websites in the United Nations system organizations;

(g) Off-shoring in United Nations system organizations;

(h) Towards more coherent United Nations system support to Africa;

(i) National execution of technical cooperation projects;

(j) Staff mobility in the United Nations system;

(k) Work/life issues in United Nations system organizations;

(l) Special Representatives of the Secretary-General and Resident Coordinators: a benchmarking framework for coherence within the United Nations system;

(m) Common services at the locations of United Nations Regional Commissions;

(n) Internships in the United Nations system.